

2.7 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire of St. Helier of the Minister for Planning and Environment regarding the provision of housing within the draft Island Plan:

I would like to begin by prefacing my question by warning the Minister that this question is being recorded. **[Laughter]** How confident is the Minister ... I promise not to use it against him in years to come. How confident is the Minister that current and future housing needs in Jersey are fully addressed within the draft Island Plan and that affordable and sheltered homes will be attainable if all planned units are delivered on time?

Senator F.E. Cohen (The Minister for Planning and Environment):

I am confident that the principal strategies set out in the draft Island Plan have the potential to meet the Island's housing requirement over the planned period. I am however aware that concerns are emerging from the consultation about certain elements of the draft plan, particularly in relation to some of the rezoning proposals and the affordable housing delivery formula. I will therefore be considering proposing amendments to the plan and will publish these shortly once the consultation period has closed and I have had a chance to digest all the responses. I would say that I am aware of the potential for a large number of sites in the built-up area that with careful planning could deliver very considerable numbers of homes and therefore, providing we have a workable affordable housing formula, I am confident that the long term demand for affordable housing can be delivered.

2.7.1 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

The Minister has helpfully informed us today, not only in his verbal answer there but in written questions, that he is currently undertaking a series of reviews and processes that will be published after he has completed them. Disappointingly he has just said that those will probably occur after the consultation closes. Is there not a danger therefore that publishing those findings after the consultation process is closed prohibits Members and the public from commenting upon those within the Island Plan?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

There are opportunities for States Members, of course, to lodge amendments to the Island Plan and they will be able to incorporate any aspects that they find of concern within those amendments.

2.7.2 Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier:

Given the question the Deputy asked about affordable and sheltered housing and the written question answered that the majority will be in the Waterfront and the Town Centre; 2,000 of these are, in the first year up to 2013, (b) category and 1,600 are (b) category up to 2018 and only 300 are marked for lifelong homes. We are already over 300. Will the Minister for Planning and Environment get real and tell us today that this Island Plan with the recession, with the population increase we already know we have, and the Island population being of over 100,000, that it is not even achievable and it is not real and it is not definitely addressing the question of affordable and sheltered housing? Please get real.

Senator F.E. Cohen:

I hope that I am real and I hope that the plan, when it is taken forward to the Inspector - and please remember there will be the opportunity for amendments tabled by Members - will deliver the required balance of housing. I firmly believe that we are capable of delivering so. There are large numbers of housing units that can be delivered in existing sites and I think needs and supply can be matched.

2.7.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Minister accept that the latest report sitting on his desk - I think it is the McLeod Report - in terms of affordable housing says that there is no such thing for the average earner in Jersey as affordable housing, we can no longer build affordable housing in any reasonable payback terms whatsoever. What does he even intend to do about it?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

It depends what the Deputy believes constitutes affordable housing. In my view affordable housing comprises a mixture of retirement housing, sheltered housing, social housing and, I hope, shared-equity housing. I believe that we can deliver a balance and if we are clever in the affordable housing formula - and that of course is up for debate within the Island Plan consultation process - we will be able to deliver the correct mix of housing.

2.7.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Minister come to the House with a summary of McLeod's conclusions detailing what he calls, what his expert calls, affordable housing and unaffordable housing?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

I am quite happy to make available a copy of the affordable housing paper to all Members.

2.7.5 Deputy I.J. Gorst of St. Clement:

In light of the Minister's comments about existing sites, will he confirm to the Assembly that he will not be bringing forward any rezoned sites without the support of the particular Parish Connétable and the Parish ... a pilot project which he successfully steered through this House with the over-55 rezoning last year?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

I would hope that Members would accept that any commitments I have given will be fully held to. We are currently in the consultation process. It would be inappropriate for me to predetermine the consultation conclusions. They will be published shortly after the closing date which is 31st March.

Deputy I.J. Gorst:

I think that was a yes; can the Minister just confirm that?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

It was not quite a yes. It was quite clear that we will be looking at the conclusions of the consultation process when the consultation concludes on 31st March.

2.7.6 Deputy D.J. De Sousa of St. Helier:

Taking the Minister back to his original answer to the original question from the Deputy; will the Minister confirm or deny then that his department will be promoting high-rise, high-density accommodation in and around the town area?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

There are opportunities for higher rise development but that does not mean poor quality development. It is perfectly appropriate that providing we deliver high quality units of good size - and I mean minimum standards plus plus - that we can deliver high quality housing for Islanders of which we can all be proud. Yes, they can be a little taller in very specific locations, but that is not a general rule.

2.7.7 Deputy D.J. De Sousa:

Supplementary; can we have the Minister's definition of "higher"?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

The view of Hopkins Architects is quite an interesting view because they think that the predominant height for St. Helier is 4 to 5 stories. I think we can go above this, but we could not go very significantly above this. I certainly do not think that we could generally go to heights of 15 or 20 stories, that is for certain.

2.7.8 The Deputy of St. Mary:

Does the Minister accept that with this proposed increase in population in the urban area it is imperative that we have adequate open space for these additional people?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

It is absolutely imperative that we have open space. It is also imperative that we protect the countryside. I am afraid that with increased housing demands we cannot protect the countryside fully and have, for example, a blanket ban on development within the built-up area of over 4 storeys. I think there has to be a balance and Members need to accept there is a balance. At the end of the day it is for Members to choose that balance, not just for me.

2.7.9 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Very useful answers this morning. I am concerned however that in the written answer in relation to the verbal answers he has given that only one Constable has formally objected to these proposals. If none of the Constables get involved at this stage - at the last minute - then unfortunately we are going to see, would the Minister not agree, a planning consultation period that has been lengthy and unsuccessful?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

I would not say the consultation period is unsuccessful. It is entirely up to the Connétables, as to other Members, to make submissions to the Island Plan consultation. It is not for me to force them to do so.